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ABSTRACT

The philosophy and structure of the Regional Staff Development Center capitalize on local expertise and energy. This structure of cooperation affords 4,500 Wisconsin educators the opportunity to learn from each other through alliances, networks, study committees, and specialized roles. Recognizing and showcasing the positive contributions of area educators enhances self-esteem and creates a climate for continuing professional growth. While serving as a clearinghouse for regional resources, the center also acts as a consortial agent for districts seeking grants, making it possible for them to secure resources and implement special projects they would have difficulty doing on their own. The center's basic mission is professional growth for educators throughout their careers. Programs and services incorporate principles of adult learning and thrive on the energy released when educators connect with and learn from one another. College and university faculty offer research and content expertise while public school teachers provide practical knowledge. A number of programs and services have been developed to achieve the center's goals of support, recognition, and training. Examples of center programs which illustrate each of these goals are presented in this paper. (JD)

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The Regional Staff Development Center of Southeastern Wisconsin

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A Regional Staff Development Center Model

E. Letven

Introduction

History

The Regional Staff Development Center serves the professional development needs of educators in 26 school districts and 3 postsecondary institutions in a two county region of southeastern Wisconsin. Within the two-county service area are both urban and rural populations. School districts vary in size from eleven (11) professional staff to 1700. The Center, which is a philosophy as well as a place, grew out of this educational community's commitment to quality education.

In the summer of 1983 all members of the local education community were rocked by the national wave of criticism of American education. By invitation of the chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, a group of educational leaders from large and small school districts, unions, boards of education and post-secondary institutions met to discuss their reactions to the reports and the resulting negative publicity.

The eventual formation of the Southeastern Wisconsin Educators' Consortium -- composed of administrative, board and teacher association leaders -- was a major step in uniting educators in the area. This diverse group eventually decided to examine the one issue they all agreed on: the need for more, and more effective, professional staff development. The Consortium's first major project was the creation of the Regional Staff Development Center in 1985.

Purpose

In defining staff development, the Regional Staff Development Center works on the premise that training is not enough. Educators need collegial support and recognition if they are to remain challenged and enthusiastic about the important work they do. Recognizing that training, support, and recognition must occur at the district and building levels, the Center seeks to supplement, not supplant, local efforts. It's role in helping meet district and building level needs is determined by the district's size and access to resources, both fiscal and personnel.

While serving as a clearinghouse for regional resources, the Center also acts as a consortial agent for districts seeking grants, making it possible for them to secure resources and implement special projects they would have difficulty doing on their own. Using this strategy, the Center now administers a variety of grants from federal agencies, the state of Wisconsin, and private foundations.

The Center's consortial structure permits a far more comprehensive staff development program than any district - particularly those in small rural areas - could provide individually. Bringing together educators from multiple districts and various grade levels breaks down the physical and political isolation characteristic of many school districts.

As the demands of teaching become more complex, it is imperative that the doors of isolation be opened. Through the Regional Staff Development Center, educators in the southeastern corner of Wisconsin are finding ways to work together as colleagues. By working together on issues of common concern, individuals are experiencing a renewed professional enthusiasm.

The Mission and the Method

The heart of the Center's mission is professional growth for educators throughout their careers. Programs and services incorporate principles of adult learning and thrive on the energy released when educators connect with and learn from one another. College and university faculty offer research and content expertise while public school teachers provide a wealth of practical knowledge. The Center's activities reflect the belief that collegial interaction facilitates professional growth and that true staff development is far more than courses and speakers.

The specific mission of the Center is three-fold: *The Regional Staff Development Center promotes support, recognition, and training for the educational community of Kenosha and Racine Counties.* A number of programs and services have been developed to achieve these goals of support, recognition and training. Examples of Center programs which illustrate each goal are provided below. Keep in mind, however, that while each example primarily supports one goal, the other two, to a lesser extent, are also being addressed.

Support

By working together on issues of common concern, individuals are finding support for their professional needs and expertise. Collaborative efforts which cross geographic and grade-level barriers continue to expand through the Center's alliances, networks, and study committees. Pilot programs emerging from these support groups capitalize on the entrepreneurial skills and research interests of the educators involved.

Academic Alliances: Academic Alliances (Gaudiani) function as educator support groups. An alliance is a group of school and university/college faculty who meet together regularly as a "community of scholars" to share experiences, knowledge, and interest in their common disciplines. The collegiality which results transcends the levels at which they teach. School and college faculty meet as colleagues to identify their needs and concerns and to design ways to improve the quality of their intellectual and professional lives.

New alliances form with each year of the Center's existence. Currently, groups are established in the subject areas of chemistry/physics, English composition, elementary science, family and consumer education, foreign language, general science, international education, mathematics, physical education, teaching Shakespeare, and technology education.

Through these alliances, members help each other maintain the spirit of inquiry crucial to the healthy intellectual life of all faculty members, regardless of the age of their students. At a recent Physics/Chemistry Alliance meeting a college professor showed the participants how he demonstrates the mirage phenomenon in his classroom. During the follow-up discussion, an elementary teacher described the approach he uses with young children; the professor enthusiastically responded by deciding to use this simplier strategy with his college students. Collegial respect is an important by-product of such an exchange of ideas, as is the sense of renewal. Commenting on her participation, one teacher remarked, "The science alliance has given me new skills and fresh enthusiasm for my entire job--not just in teaching science. It's been a cool glass of water on a hot, dusty road. Really hits the spot!"

Networks: Similar in design to alliances, but different in focus, networks operate as professional idea exchanges among educators with mutual interests or common challenges. Some networks are position-specific such as counselors, exceptional education teachers, library/media specialists, social workers, and speech and language therapists. Others are grade level-specific such as teachers of early childhood/kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade, while still others attract those who share a common interest in such areas as cooperative learning, gifted and talented, the middle level child, middle/secondary reading, multicultural education, and women in administration.

Networks generally share a common heritage. A steering committee, convened by the Center, plans a "kick-off" event which reaches out to all educators in a specific discipline or interest area. For example, the Cooperative Learning Network began with a dinner meeting open to all interested educators. The speaker, a local middle school principal, led a discussion that appealed to the full range of teaching levels represented, elementary through postsecondary. From the discussion at this initial gathering, the planning committee set the direction and developed themes for successive meetings. Each meeting had a special focus. At one, practitioners of cooperative learning shared techniques they had found particularly successful; at another, a newsletter was prepared for regional distribution. Subsequent meetings were devoted to making non-practitioners aware of the various techniques and models of cooperative learning.

Because networks are organized by their own members, no two are alike; however, some common features exist. All have program coordinators and planning committees, assess their members' needs, set goals for themselves, and draw members from across different levels throughout the geographic area.

Study Committees: Classroom teachers rarely have the opportunity to analyze and then act on the conditions affecting their professional lives. Study committees are one vehicle

the Center uses to help teachers escape the intellectual stagnation and isolation that often plague their daily workplaces. Each study committee, working toward a tangible product, helps build teacher self-esteem. As an elementary teacher said after an all-day meeting of a study committee, "I came away with a feeling of pride. I was treated as an intelligent adult. It was wonderful to spend a day sharing ideas with 'adults'. I went home refreshed and eager to go to school the next day." This teacher helped design a beginning teacher assistance program which now serves all 26 school districts in the Center's membership area.

Project Assist,, a beginning teacher/mentor program, emerged from a six month study by an interdistrict committee of teachers, school board members, and administrators. From this Beginning Teacher Study Committee, a comprehensive program emerged with support seminars for new teachers, mentor training for experiened teachers, and an orientation checklist for administrative use with teachers new to buildings. These tangible outcomes were important to committee members, but the collegial relationships that developed during the study committee's deliberations exceeded everyone's expectations. Working together on a common concern blurred the lines of authority among administrators, teachers and board members. Teachers found it stimulating, board members learned more about the needs of teachers, and administrators were reminded of the everyday demands on classroom teachers.

A second study committee emerged when a humanities professor came to the Center concerned about her students' lack of knowledge of different cultures, even within their own communities. Her college students were unable to understand, much less discuss, the issues of cross-cultural communication. Center staff responded by inviting educators with teaching experience in multicultural settings to meet and react to these concerns. Subsequent meetings of this group resulted in a human relations handbook and an external grant which initiated, and now maintains, the 3-year-old *Multicultural Education Program.*

Study committees are created as needs emerge. Strong concerns and frustration often provide the energy and commitment for a group to explore and examine an issue in depth. As long as challenges are present in the work lives of educators, new approaches to problem solving, such as study committees, will play an important role in their professional development.

Recognition

An often neglected, but vital component of any staff development program is recognition of creativity and excellence. A school culture survey conducted by representatives of area schools indicated that recognition efforts received little attention in most districts. Through the Center, several programs have been initiated to encourage the recognition of good work.

Educators Hall of Fame: Each year five exemplary area educators are honored and recognized for their contributions to the educational community by being inducted into the*Southeastern Wisconsin Educators' Hall of Fame*. Nominees must have had a

significant impact on education in southeastern Wisconsin. The involvement of teachers and administrators in the nomination of collegues and the support of local newspapers in conducting the annual ceremony contributes to the meaningful recognition of educational excellence. Recipients have included teachers from kindergarten to college level and administrators from the building level to the superintendency. Position is unimportant, quality and impact are the determining factors.

A formal dinner and recognition ceremony celebrating the induction also includes the welcoming to the profession of recent education graduates from the two local teacher education programs. They are recognized for their choice of career and welcomed into the profession by the Wisconsin Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Educators' Showcase: Public education and awareness is the goal of the *Educators' Showcase*, held each year at an area shopping mall. Individual schools, as well as the Center's networks and alliances, exhibit state of the art educational techniques, materials, and student work during the two-day event. Performances and demonstrations on the mall stage show the general public the best of what schools are offering in the sciences and arts.

Mini-Grants: Each year, competitive grants ranging from $50 to $250 are awarded to area teachers to pursue innovative and exploratory projects of direct benefit to students. Grants for the 1989-90 school year ranged from an interdisciplinary/intergrade project where eighth grade students designed and sewed costumes for a fifth grade physical education square dancing unit, to one in which qualified laboratory personnel assisted a rural fifth grade science teacher by providing cholesterol screening during a science unit on the circulatory system.

Training

The Regional Staff Development Center provides workshops and seminars which emerge from the needs and interests of local educators. The types of training experiences range from single session information passing to weekend conferences to multi-session all day programs spaced throughout the academic year.

Developing Drug-free Schools: Twenty-two school districts in the two-county rural areas form the *Southeastern Wisconsin AODA Consortium* through the Regional Staff Development Center. The purpose of this consortium is to develop and expand effective drug-free school programs which increase drug and alcohol awareness in school personnel, students and parents. By training and empowering school-based advocates and community members, more sharing of effective programs and materials is occuring among districts, and new school/community partnerships are emerging.

Science Fellows: Initiated with state funds, and continued with federal support, the Partnership of Industry and Education's *Science Fellows Program*, was implemented by the University of Wisconsin-Parkside and the Regional Staff Development Center to improve elementary science education in Kenosha and Racine counties. Forty-two "science-anxious" teachers, selected annually from public and private elementary

schools in the area, attend a series of eight mini-courses in physical science using hands-on teaching strategies. Upon completion of the program, these fellows become resource teachers within their school buildings. The goal of the program is to have a core of teachers in each elementary school trained in process science instruction. This cohort group of teachers also support one another with information and ideas through the Elementary Science Alliance.

Since its inception, the program has continued to expand. Three former science fellows have become full-time elementary science specialists, bringing updated knowledge and techniques into classrooms through demonstrations. The partnership with business and industry has resulted in a roving science mobile, linkages between classroom teachers and working scientists, and class field trips to area laboratories, trade shows and expositions.

Regional Inservice Day: A major event of each year is that Friday in February, when 4,500 educators in the two county area convene to attend a series of speeches, workshops, and seminars coordinated by the Regional Staff Development Center. Regional Inservice exemplifies the collegial nature of the Center and synthesizes the three goals of the mission statement: support, training and recognition. Under the guidance of a Regional Core Planning Committee, a number of groups representing member districts, alliances and networks, and special interest groups develop the program and monitor its success. Teachers not only plan the program (support), but also serve as presenters (recognition). Regional Inservice provides teachers convenient access to a major conference, complete with a wide variety of workshop choices and recognized speakers (inservice training).

Specialized Roles Lead to Learning

Beyond the collegial learning inherent in support groups and study committees, special interactive leadership roles assumed by educators through the Regional Staff Development Center are rich in professional growth experiences.

Staffing the Center

The innovative staffing structure of the Regional Staff Development Center encourages teacher participation and leadership. Teachers fulfilling several different roles augment the permanent administrative team comprised of the director, assistant director, and clerical staff. While center associates, program coordinators, and contact teachers do much of the Center's work, their responsibilities also expect them to learn as well as lead.

Center associates, experienced classroom teachers on leave from their districts, spend a year working full time at the Center. Selected on the basis of administrative recommendation, application and an interview process, they represent a cross-section of the Center's membership. This work experience involves far more than merely staffing an existing organization and monitoring on-going programs. Working together to facilitate staff development for all teachers in the two counties, center associates gain an

understanding of the "big picture" in education by discovering the joys and challenges of teachers, administrators, and board members.

Doing the work of the Center is only part of the associate experience. Learning and growing as an educator are important products of their year at the Center. To help focus their experiences, each associate develops a professional development plan, with funds and support available to facilitate the successful accomplishment of his/her goals. Each plan identifies areas of desired growth and specific strategies for achieving them. Activities might include national and/or regional conference participation, credit courses, team teaching with a college faculty member, supervising student teachers, conducting research, and/or memberships in professional organizations. In doing the Center's work, associates also build a number of skills such as facilitating support groups, leading group discussions, making presentations, writing grants, and producing a monthly newsletter.

As the Center's membership and numbers of programs grew, its organizational structure creatively expanded. Every support group (alliance, network, or study committee) has at least one **program coordinator** who organizes and facilitates the activities of the group, with the help of the center associates. These coordinators are full time classroom teachers who receive a modest stipend for their after-school efforts. Occasionally they meet as a group to discuss their particular programs and encourage each other. Adult learning styles and leadership skills are examples of the topics discussed.

Contact teachers are the communication link between schools and the Center. Each of the more than 100 school buildings served by the Center has one or two contact teachers. These teachers are responsible for all communications to and from the Center, including distribution of the monthly newsletter. They also serve as in-house advocates of Center activities, sharing their knowledge of programs and encouraging participation.

Additional Leadership Roles

Through the Center's pilot induction program, experienced teachers serve as **mentors** for beginning teachers. Mentors introduce new teachers to the building and the faculty, help them learn the curriculum, provide appropriate feedback on instructional skills, and impart "tricks of the trade." Mentors benefit from these relationships as well, learning new approaches and sometimes reevaluating their own practices.

Teachers serve as **staff development advocates** on the County Staff Development Council which was formed to provide the region's non-urban school districts with the equivalent of the inservice committees of larger districts. Each school building from the 24 non-urban districts has a teacher representative on this committee who attends monthly meetings which are designed to accomplish three goals: 1) collect and dispense information, 2) develop leadership opportunities, and 3) discuss current educational trends.

Teams of **grant writers** often emerge from study committees. These collegial writing experiences give classroom teachers the opportunity to put their practitioner experiences to meaningful use. By contributing their expertise in the development of proposals,

teachers remind college/university faculty of the realities of the classroom. Working with higher education faculty or other K-12 educators, these teachers learn how to develop need statements and formulate plans to address those needs. Since the writing and rewriting process requires hard work, a true sense of accomplishment accompanies the completion of a grant proposal.

Assessment of Needs

The range of programs offered through the Regional Staff Development Center requires a variety of assessment procedures. Some have involved the membership-at-large while others are targeted for specific programs.

An early regional assessment included a 16-part survey completed by educators during the Center's first year (1985-86). It's purpose was to determine general professional development needs and interests while at the same time making the teachers aware of the Center's existence. This survey helped shape the general program direction of the Center and clarified the need for the three approaches to staff development (support, recognition, and training). In 1986-87, teachers participated in a Career Stages Assessment Inventory (Collegial Research Consortium, 1986) which linked interests with such criteria as years in education and career attitudes. Through this inventory, professional development avenues and incentives for participation were identified for teachers at different career stages. This data helped shape the scope and delivery of the Center's services and programs.

The Regional Staff Development Center, as an organization, was carefully analyzed in its 1987 Strategic Plan using three assessments: an environmental (community) scan, an internal (staff) assessment and a market (client) assessment. The resulting seven strategic goals and their action objectives continue to guide Center activities.

Special surveys which are position, grade-level, or discipline-specific are also used. Examples include the Program Coordinator Year-end Survey, the Elementary Science Needs Survey, and Regional Inservice surveys. Alliance and network program coordinators also conduct need assessments as part of their group planning processes to establish yearly themes and special workshops.

Special programs such as Project Assist, Elementary Science Fellows, and the Multicultural Education Fellows Program undergo formal evaluation. Strategic goals, developed by a broad-based committee of administrators and teachers, serve as the foundation for program evaluation. Formal evaluation of special programs is done through pre and post inventories with research assistance from university faculty.

Finally, informal assessment is ongoing. Due to its flexible nature, the Center is in a unique position to respond quickly to the expressed needs of administrators and teachers. Through the *Center Exchange*, the monthly newsletter, or during various presentations, individuals are encouraged to contact the Center directly with ideas for new projects or suggestions for initiating professional support groups.

Organizational Structure

Policy Making

The Center's management system is influenced by the same collegial culture that permeates the entire operation. The Southeastern Wisconsin Educators' Consortium, which founded the Center, now serves as its governing body. Members of the Consortium include the director of the Center, the CEO, a board member and a faculty member from each large institution/district, representatives from the clusters of rural districts, and representatives from the three local teachers' associations. These superintendents, college presidents, teacher union officials, and school board members meet monthly as a consortium to make policy decisions about the use of resources, access to programs, and relationships to outside community agencies. Urban and rural, large and small, K-12 and post-secondary - all meet as equals and make decisions by consensus.

While policy decisions are made by the Educators' Consortium, the Program Advisory Board is responsible for needs assessment, program development, and evaluation. This advisory board includes members of all the constituent groups (teachers, administrators, union officials, board members and post-secondary representatives). Program Advisory Board meetings often include lively discussions about how to best deliver staff development. Many issues are explored such as: using the professional day for training, involving career stagnant teachers, and developing collegial relationships between college faculty and K-12 teachers.

Program Implementation

Implementation of programs is the responsiblity of the director. Assignments are made by the director to staff members and are monitored by the assistant director. Associates are expected to keep the assistant director informed of their projects; weekly staff meetings are dedicated to information sharing and problem solving. Decisions are made by consensus. When differences surface, they are resolved by staff discussion; if necessary, final resolution is the responsibility of the director. In this collegial model, differences are often the healthy result of intense program ownership on the part of planners and participants. Respecting divergent perspectives and opinions is an important element of the Center's culture.

Resources

Resources needed to operate the Center are generated in three ways: 1) each district/institution contributes a fee based on its number of staff members, 2) grants from public and private sources fund special programs and often include some funds for Center support services, and 3) the University of Wisconsin-Parkside furnishes support for the director's and lead secretary's positions while also providing the physical facility and its maintenance.

On an annual basis the director develops the budget and monitors the spending. The Consortum, upon approving the budget, contracts with UW-Parkside to serve as the Center's fiscal agent. Fiscal resources are spent in direct relation to program priorities. It is a priority-driven system based upon a clear vision of program direction.

Collegiality, Then Ownership

The philosophy and structure of the Regional Staff Development Center capitalize on local expertise and energy. This structure of cooperation affords 4,500 Wisconsin educators the opportunity to learn from each other through alliances, networks, study committees, and specialized roles. Recognizing and showcasing the positive contributions of area educators enhances self-esteem and creates a climate for continuing professional growth.

The Center offers professional development within a culture that recognizes human development as a function of engagement with others in a professional culture that offers choice, authority, and responsibility. It's the Center's belief that staff development is more than courses and speakers. Through the Center, educators are learning by choosing new roles (center associates, program coordinators, mentors), new relationships (alliances and networks), new instructional strategies (science fellows, multicultural education), and new learning opportunities (study committees, videoconferences).

The Regional Staff Development Center attributes its success to the spirit of collegiality and feelings of ownership experienced by its members. Decison making resides with those closest to the programs since the Center's philosophy is to invite educators to their "own" programs, not to those of the "Center's." Together, regardless of level or position, both the challenges and joys of being an educator are celebrated through the Regional Staff Development Center.

As an organization, the Regional Staff Development Center has been recognized in several ways. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction selected the Center as a Teaching Incentives Pilot Program which resulted in Project Assist, a beginning teacher induction program. In 1986 the Wisconsin Association of Teacher Educators gave the Center their Professional Development Program Award. With the granting of a 1988 Showcase of Excellence Award for Exemplary Staff Development Programs by the National Council of States on Inservice Education (NCSIE), the Regional Staff Development Center received national recognition.

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